

OUR CONVERTS OR THE LORD'S DISCIPLES?

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[The following is excerpted from a sermon entitled "What Does It Cost?" by J.B. Buffington. It was preached in 1984 at Calvary Baptist Church, in Lakeland, Florida. Brother Buffington, who was born in 1923, pastored Calvary Baptist from 1963 to 1993. Since then, instead of "retiring," he has traveled widely with an itinerant preaching ministry. I was born and raised in Lakeland; and we were members of Calvary Baptist Church when we went to the mission field in February 1979, and Dr. Buffington was our pastor at that time.]

The command of Jesus Christ in the Great Commission is to make disciples. "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (Mat. 28:19-20).

There is a vast difference between a convert and a disciple. Jesus said, "Follow me." He passed by Andrew and Peter and by James and Matthew and said, "Follow me." If we do not make disciples, we will never evangelize the world.

When we open the Scriptures, the word "disciple" occurs 269 times in the New Testament, but only three times do we find the word "Christian." I think we should stop asking people, "Are you a Christian?" and ask them instead, "Are you a disciple of Jesus Christ?"

I sat on an airplane yesterday and witnessed to a young man. He had always been a Christian, he said, had always believed in the teachings of Jesus. I said, "Religion is one thing but religion will only take you to hell. You have to know Jesus Christ as your personal Saviour." He said, "I don't feel bad at people who need church to get along, but I don't need it." The man doesn't know what salvation is. If you follow Jesus Christ, it is going to cost you something, and if it doesn't cost you anything you are not following Jesus Christ! We have used the term "Christian" so much that I suppose that the devil wouldn't mind being called a Christian. Oh, that term "Christian" meant something in the beginning. It meant suffering; it meant separation.

We are more concerned today about converts, but converts to what? If a man is converted to Christ, he is converted to following Christ, and following Christ is following His Word. We need to tell people that it is going to cost something. We are afraid we will lost somebody. Tell them! Jesus told them! We deal with them and when they make a profession of faith we ask them, "Do you want to be baptized?" You didn't find that in the Bible. We put it in their minds that you don't have to be baptized. No sir, you don't have to be baptized to get saved, but if you get saved and don't have a desire to get baptized I am afraid for you. If you really got saved, you just got through turning your life over to the LORD Jesus Christ. That means He is Lord; He runs your life; He rules your life; what He says is an order. But we are afraid to tell them. Well, tell them! Tell them when they get saved. Tell them! I am tired of people making a profession of faith and they don't want to be baptized. Personal workers, tell them!

What are you converting them to? You are telling them that they don't have to get involved, but the Great Commission is involvement. If you get saved, something happens in your heart and life!

Micky Cohen was a notable gangster. Somebody dealt with him about the plan of salvation and he finally got Micky to bow his head and pray a sinner's prayer. He told him, "If you will repeat this prayer after me, you can know right here and now that you will be reborn as a son of God and will live in heaven forever. You have seen the high life, Micky, but none of us have seen anything like heaven. Will you pray with me?" To his surprise, Micky repeated the prayer. After that Micky went to a gospel meeting, and the preacher said, "You think you are good enough and that you have done nothing worthy of damnation. The fact is that you deserve the damnation of hell. There is no middle ground between heaven and hell. You are either on the road to one or the other. Tonight you have to make your choice, every man, every woman, every boy, every girl. You must make your choice between pleasure and Christ, between popularity and Christ, between money and Christ, between amusements and Christ, whatever is keeping you from the kingdom of God. You have to make a choice tonight, and if you refuse to make the choice, that very act means that you have already made the choice." That night, Mickey got angry and said to the man who had dealt with him, "You never told me that I had to give up my career or my friends. There are Christian movie stars, Christian athletes, so what is wrong with being a Christian gangster? If I have to give up all of that; if that's Christianity; count me out!"

We have given people the idea that you can get saved and it won't cost you anything, you can simply continue on your way. No sir, salvation is repentance. I'm going one way, and repentance is a 100% change of direction. Anything that doesn't turn you around is not repentance. All people are going the wrong way; they are going to hell; and repentance is a change of mind. It is saying, "I'm tired of going in that direction; I want to go in a new direction." If you say that you have gotten saved but you keep going in the same old direction, you have never repented! You have never changed your mind about sin, about self, and about God. Salvation is an about face. It turns you around in your life. Christ Jesus came to save us *from* our sins, not to save us *in* our sins.

We are so mixed up that we are afraid we are going to lose somebody. Then lose them! You can't lose them until you get them, and you don't get them by compromising.

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